



CFSA Fact Sheet



Serving Abused and Neglected Children and Troubled Families in the District of Columbia

CFSA Improves Safety, Permanence, and Well Being

Every child has a basic human right to be safe from abuse and neglect. The D.C. Code provides the following definitions.

Child abuse is . . .

- Putting a child in a dangerous situation.
- Non-accidental injury of a child.
- Adult sexual exploitation of, or adult sexual contact with, a child.
- Mental or emotional injury to a child caused by parental (or caretaker) behavior.

Child neglect is . . .

Inadequate food, shelter, supervision, education, or medical care of a child due to parental (or caretaker) behavior, excluding financial means.

In the District, the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has the legal authority to protect child victims, and those at risk, of abuse and neglect throughout the city. District law requires protection of children and youths up to age 21.

Four Basic Functions

Like public child protection agencies across the nation, CFSA protects children through four basic functions.

- **Taking and Investigating Reports.** While CFSA Intake and Investigations serves as the gateway to the local public child protection system, the community at large plays a major role in identifying children in need of protection. CFSA takes reports of known or suspected abuse and neglect of children in the District 24 hours a day at (202) 671-SAFE. When reports indicate children have been or are at risk of abuse or neglect as defined in law, CFSA must investigate to determine whether each report is true or false. CFSA's full-time investigators look into child abuse and neglect wherever they occur in the District—in private homes, day-care centers, schools, camps, foster or group homes, hospitals, or other any other settings.

Safety
Permanence
Well Being

- **Working with Families.** Child welfare is unique in that serving our primary clients—children—means gaining the cooperation of and helping their parents (or caretakers). When CFSA identifies child victims, or children at risk of, abuse or neglect, trained social workers from CFSA or private organizations under contract to CFSA step in to keep children safe by working with their families. Sometimes, we provide immediate help to avert an emergency (such as eviction) and prevent children and families from entering the child welfare system. In most cases, however, CFSA stays involved to connect families to services that will help them overcome long-standing difficulties that endanger their children. More than half of CFSA's cases involve social workers monitoring the safety and well being of children at home with their parents.

Safety
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- **Providing Safe Out-of-Home Care.** When a family home (or other living environment) presents too much danger, CFSA has the authority to remove children to safe settings. (We must, however, promptly seek agreement with the removal from the District's Family Court). Often, relatives are willing to take in children who cannot be safe home. CFSA recruits, trains, and licenses foster parents and also licenses, monitors, and maintains contracts with group homes (and other safe places) for children. People interested in fostering District children can call (202) 671-LOVE for information.

Safety
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Children develop best in stable situations—preferably within the bonds of a family. For that reason, removal of children from home is usually temporary, at least initially. The goal is to help parents resolve crises and overcome difficulties so they can protect and nurture their children at home. However, when parents are unable to protect their children, CFSA and Family Court seek stability, or permanence, for children outside their homes.

- **Getting Children Adopted.** Too many youngsters are growing up in the nation's child welfare system while waiting and hoping for a "forever family." CFSA recruits and trains people willing to provide permanent, nurturing homes for District children and teens through adoption. Most of these children are age 8 or older. Many want to be adopted along with their brothers or sisters. The District provides financial and other long-term support for families who adopt through CFSA. People interested in adopting District children can call (202) 671-LOVE for information. (Legal guardianship is an alternative to adoption for relatives, and others, who want to provide a permanent home for children without terminating parental rights.)

Safety
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Innovations

Beyond basic child welfare functions, public child protection in the District has some unique local features.

- The **Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives** are seven private, non-profit, community-base networks that serve children and families at the neighborhood level. Established in 1996, through a partnership between the District and community-based providers, the Collaboratives offer a broad range of helping programs to children and families, including services to families at risk that prevent them from involvement

with the public child protection system. CFSA routinely refers selected child protective cases to the Collaboratives and now has about 25 percent of the caseload privatized.

- Established in 2001, CFSA's **Clinical Practice** function helps social workers meet the many complex health and mental health needs of children and families involved with the child welfare system. The in-house Clinical Practice team of experienced child-serving professionals includes licensed clinical psychologists, a pediatrician, and registered nurses.
- CFSA established a **Youth Development** function in 2002, specifically to serve the many teens and young adults involved with the agency. About half of the youngsters on CFSA's caseload are between the ages of 13 and 21. In addition to breaking down barriers to adoption of these older children, Youth Development prepares them to be self-supporting when they leave the child welfare system. n